Prioritizing your Mental Health During this COVID-19 Outbreak: A Jamaican Perspective

Monique A. Lynch
Programme Coordinator
The PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing &
Midwifery Development in the Caribbean
The UWI School of Nursing
Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica

Simeon Okachi
Final Year Medical Student
M.D Programme
May Pen Hospital
1 Muirhead Avenue,
Denbigh, Clarendon, Jamaica

Abstract:- In this paper, the authors discussed the actions being taken by the government of Jamaica during this COVID-19 crisis, highlighted the determinants and risk factors for mental health issues among the general public and medical professionals, gave suggestions on how to increase awareness for mental health by implementing different strategies and gave tips on how persons can promote good mental health practices for themselves.

Keywords:- Mental Health Awareness, Public Health Concern, Mental Wellness, Covid-19 Crisis, Mental Health Interventions.

I. INTRODUCTION

During this time of uncertainty and crises, many persons are worried about their health, their finances, their jobs, their children, their loved ones, the bills and other obligations and rightly so. Many questions are left unanswered, not knowing how long this crisis will last, not being able to control the outcomes, not being able to 100% protect yourself and your family and the long-term effects this period will have on the economy, it is SCARY. However, if we are not careful, this state of constantly being worried and fearful can be easily escalated into STRESS and stress is a MAJOR RISK FACTOR for MOST MENTAL ILLNESSES.

II. MEASURES FOR OUR MENTAL WELLNESS

A. Why is mental health not a priority?

The burden on the health sector in this coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis must not be underestimated, as there have been many health promotion strategies by the Ministry of Health & Wellness in Jamaica to ensure the general public is educated on proper hand hygiene, summary of what is COVID-19, the signs and symptoms, tips on how to reduce the risks of the coronavirus infection, several hotline numbers to call in case of an emergency or any suspected cases and several press releases to keep us informed on the status of the country and contingency plans. Of course, following all the measures to maintain physical health is a priority, but what about our mental health?

We fail to realize that the determinants of our mental well-being are not only predisposed by individual traits, but also by the social circumstances in which persons find themselves and the environment in which they are exposed to (WHO, 2012). These determinants interrelate with each other dynamically and can threaten an individual's mental health state. The truth is, we have all been exposed to and/or displaced by the effects of this crisis and we can definitely agree that we are all in some way or another susceptible to experiencing mental health problems, especially households living in poverty, people who live with abusers, people whose livelihood is affected, people with chronic health conditions, minority groups and our essential workers who are daily risking their lives to keep us safe.

B. Potential psychological issues for medical professionals

Our medical professionals here in Jamaica and around the world are the direct Frontline soldiers in this battle against COVID-19 and are far stretched by demand: double and triple shifts, some are unable to go home out of fear of endangering family members, some are fearful for their lives and the lives of their patients, some are dealing with difficult patients who are refusing to be quarantined and/or treated and many find themselves in a constant state of confusion trying to be productive. One can only imagine the high levels of emotion and stress that they are experiencing during this time and it begs to wonder, how are they coping? According to Mao (2020), with a crisis of this magnitude, psychological counselling for crisis intervention is needed for all medical staff since they are at higher risks for psychological issues.

C. Potential risk for public mental health issues outbreak

Many studies show that the psychological impact of isolation, social distancing and accessing support during crises is widespread and substantial and can include but limited to depression, anxiety, misuse of drugs and alcohol, and other serious effects, especially for some at-risk populations (persons with mental illnesses, unattached youths, poverty stricken communities, persons with disabilities, the minorities and persons living with abusers etc.) that are very much present here in Jamaica (Deschutes County Behavioral Health, 2020). If our mental well-being makes up an integral part of our capacity to manage our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, interactions with others and to make day-to-day decisions and choices; then why is it

that when our capacity is being challenged in a crisis, we are clueless on how to respond?

We often hear the slogan, "there's no real health, but without mental health" but how many of us really place value and/or is very intentional about maintaining good mental health. Dr. Moffic from the Psychiatry & Behavioral Health Learning Network (2020) stated that the infection of our minds often races ahead of the infection in our bodies and therefore, urges countries to not only strive for a contained COVID-19 or virus-free population while fueling the fire for a public mental ill-health outbreak out of ignorance.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequently, more action needs to be taken by the Ministry of Health such as increased mental health promotion strategies, hotline numbers for mental health cases and emergencies, counsellors/psychologists/psychiatrists on call 24/7 for medical professionals, essential workers and general public, and public announcements to stress the importance of taking proactive measures to manage our mental health during these times of uncertainty.

Let us all resolve to make our own mental health a priority throughout this crisis and beyond. Here are 3 ways in which you can promote good mental health:

➢ Seek help. If you're struggling with a persistent inability to sleep or eat, increasing drug or alcohol usage, an overwhelming sense of depression or panic, urges to harm yourself or others, inability to manage negative thoughts or an inability to take care of yourself or those who depend on you. Please call a crisis line or the nonemergency COVID-19 info lines set out by the Ministry of Health & Wellness, Jamaica. These are 888-ONE-LOVE (663-5683), 876-754-7792, 876-542-5998, 876-542-6007, 876-542- 6006 and 876-542-5998. Members of the public may also make contact the Ministry via email using covid19@moh.gov.jm or jacovid19facts@gmail.com.

➢ Social connections amidst social distancing. Keeping in touch with your friends and family, talking through your concerns and feelings, receive support and care, and assist other people in their times of need and reach out to someone who may be feeling alone or concerned.

➢ Managing stress. While stress is often inescapable, being able to identify what triggers your stress and knowing how to cope is key in maintaining good mental health. Try to manage your worries by breaking them down into small tasks and then try solving them. By doing this, you will realize that they are manageable and attainable. Taking some time to meditate (read a book, pray, play a game, watch a movie, be quiet etc.) or just introspect is a perfect way of de-stressing and calming your mind. Find what works for you and apply it.

IV. CONCLUSION

Let us endeavor to take care of both our physical and mental health throughout this crisis and follow every guideline given by our authorities, it is for our own wellbeing. Stay at home, it can save your life and the lives of others.

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